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SUBJECT: Kivus Conference Closure Ceremony

¶1. (U) Summary: The five-hour closing ceremony of the Kivus Conference January 23 featured the two-hour signing of the "Acte d'Engagement" by 58 parties. The CNDP was the first and the key signer. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The much delayed-closing ceremony of the Kivus Conference on Peace, Security, and Development, which had begun January 6 and had originally been projected to conclude January 14, finally took place on the late afternoon and evening of January 23. In fact, the business of the conference was not quite complete, as the conference had not yet voted on the many resolutions proposed by the many subcommittees -- work that continues January 24. But a great many people, to include President Kabila and various international personalities, had other things to do than remain in Goma.

¶3. (SBU) The key element to the Goma peace process lay outside deliberations of the conference. It was the "Declaration of Commitment" ("Acte d'Engagement") negotiated by the government and the CNDP and international facilitators, outside but parallel to the conference, with increasing intensity and frustration over the previous five days. The seesaw process of doom and joy finally had tilted in the direction of success with a direct telephone conversation among Nkunda and conference leaders Kamerhe and Malu Malu on the morning of January 23. The government, with much reluctance, conceded a persistent CNDP demand: that the opening of the document clearly state that the government was as solemnly committed as the CNDP.

¶4. (SBU) The five-hour ceremony, in an airless and packed room holding over 400 conference participants (with many more hundreds watching through closed-circuit television in other halls of the Great Lakes University), featured a stage with President Kabila sitting in isolation on one side and conference leaders Vital Kamerhe, Father Apollinaire Malu Malu, and Azarias Ruberwa sitting at a table on the other. A signing table lay between and below. Kabila was impassive throughout. Rwanda, though invited, had no representative present. Diplomats from Kinshasa did not make an appearance, having the previous day gotten as far as Bukavu and turned around on learning that the closing would not take place as scheduled then.

¶5. (SBU) Kamerhe opened with a rousing speech, which garnered the greatest applause of any of the many speeches during the evening. He assured President Kabila that what he had done, in calling for the conference and by approving the "acte d'engagement," was not an act of weakness but of grandeur. Nkunda and other leaders of armed groups, he said, had decided with the government to go down the road of peace, and they would be received as brothers. Kamerhe reviewed for the audience the main elements of the acte d'engagement, and he did not flinch from highlighting the areas of concession by the government. He stressed that all parties, including the government,

had solemnly committed themselves to the agreement's requirements, to include, in the first instance, a total and immediate cessation of hostilities over the entire territory of the two provinces. He said that a mixed Peace and Security Technical Commission would be established to handle issues of disengagement and brassage, as well as political, humanitarian, and social issues. The signatories, he said, would enjoy amnesty for insurrection, but not, he stressed, for war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide. The agreement, he said, would be a strong signal to the many displaced persons and refugees that they could begin the process of returning to their homes.

¶6. (SBU) There then began the two-hour signing of the documents (one each for North and for South Kivu but identical except for the names of armed groups). The two essential signers were the head of the CNDP delegation and the Minister of State for the Interior, Denis Kalume. Also key were the international facilitators, new SRSG Alan Doss for the United Nations, Special Envoy Roeland van de Geer for the European Union, Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Tim Shortley for the United States,

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Special Envoy Pierre Yere for the African Union, and Executive Secretary Liberata Mulamula for the International Conference on the

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Great Lakes Region. There were fifty-eight signers altogether. Armed groups from each of the provinces accounted for 30 of the signers, some of them Mai Mai groups that few people had heard of (leading to speculation that they had been created by the government expressly for the occasion). Conference leaders, traditional chiefs, civil society, private sector, and religious confessions accounted for the remainder.

¶7. (SBU) With the signing finally done, next came the speeches. SRSG Doss, van de Geer, and Shortley all sounded the themes of the historic nature of the Goma Agreement, hopes for a better future, with the international community committed to assisting in bringing

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about that future, and an admonition that the real work was only beginning. Malu Malu gave the longest speech of the evening, reviewing the difficulties of making such a conference a success in Goma, especially when the projected attendees had swelled from 500 to 1200. He had a long list of thank-you's but reserved special gratitude to the international facilitators who had gritted it out. He then read every word of the acte d'engagement, as if to underline that it was not to be in any way a secret undertaking.

¶8. (SBU) President Kabila gave a concluding fifteen-minute speech, as unemotional in its delivery as had been his stoic presence throughout the five hours of signing and speech-giving. The audience was respectful and not enthusiastic. He spoke frankly about the huge challenges that lay ahead for the Kivus, with an emphasis on developmental needs. He thanked the international facilitators and placed particular emphasis on the role of the international community in meeting those development needs.

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